

This Week In Congress

November 8, 2004

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

President's Top Health Care Official Visits Kansas

After winning reelection on Tuesday, President Bush made it clear that improving health care in America is one of the priorities for his second term. This week, I continued my own focus on this topic by bringing the Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Mark McClellan, M.D., to Kansas.

Administrator McClellan is the President's top health care official. Friday's visit allowed McClellan to meet with Kansas health officials and see firsthand the issues facing health care in Kansas. As our community health care providers work to deal with new laws, such as the Medicare Modernization Act, it is important that officials in Washington, D.C., understand the way it affects the people in Kansas and across the country. The only way to accurately convey the challenges facing our hospitals is to bring officials to Kansas to see things for themselves.

During his visit to Kansas, Administrator McClellan and I held a meeting with officials representing hospitals, doctors, nursing homes, ambulance operators, pharmacists and home health agencies. Among those visiting health care professionals were Dr. Daniel Suiter of the Kansas Medical Society, Karla Finnell of the Association for the Medically Underserved, Terri Johnson of Kansas State Nurses Association, Fred Lucky and Tom Bell of the Kansas Hospital Association, Diana Sherrar from the Kansas Physical Therapy Association, Greg Hannen from the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas, Cindy Luxem of the Kansas Health Care Association, Cheryl Hinshaw of the Kansas Home Care Association and Via Christi Home Health, Sandy Kuhlman and Renee Hahn of the Kansas Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, Debra Zehr of the Kansas Association of Homes and Services for the Aging, Tom Laing and Carol Lee Minor of InterHab, State Senator Ruth Teichman of Stafford, Velma Goertzen and Jeff Harbet of Health Equip in Hutchinson and Bonnie Ray of the Center for Independent Living in Liberal.

Administrator McClellan and I were also able to tour the facilities of the Pratt Regional Health Center in Pratt and the Kiowa County Hospital in Greensburg. The event was a success and helped to advance the rural health care cause on a national level.

Hearing from Veterans in Hutchinson

On Monday, I hosted a forum to give veterans in south central Kansas an opportunity to discuss the delivery of benefits and health care through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Charles Woolford, Director for the Robert J. Dole VA Regional Office, and Tom Sanders, Director for the Robert J. Dole VA Medical Center, were my guests.

Veterans left the forum with the director's pledge that they will work to ensure that veterans receive the benefits they are entitled. Our country owes a tremendous debt to our veterans, and forums like these allow those responsible within the VA to hear directly from the people they serve. As demands on our VA system increase, so too does the need to keep the lines of communication open.

This was the fourth forum that I have held across the district, with others being held in Goodland, Salina and Clay Center. Our veterans deserve the highest quality of care, and I will continue to work toward this goal.

Visiting Kansas Communities

Ellinwood and Lyons

On Monday, I visited the communities of Ellinwood and Lyons. While in Ellinwood, I made stops at the hospital, city hall and Chamber of Commerce. I also stopped by the local oil company, insurance agent and the Wheat Bowl offices. In Lyons, I visited the courthouse, Chamber of Commerce, drug store, bank, restaurant, post office and hospital. I also made stops at the public library and city hall and joined the Rice County Commissioners for their weekly meeting.

These community visits provide me with an opportunity to meet with a number of Kansans from a variety of backgrounds. The issues that we covered ranged from rising health care costs and the elections, to economic development and the challenges facing the agriculture industry. I will take their suggestions back to Washington, D.C. when Congress reconvenes.

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Hutchinson

On Monday evening, I joined approximately 200 farmers and ranchers for the annual Reno County Farm Bureau meeting. I spoke to the group about a number of issues facing the agriculture community and what is being done on a federal level to address them. Among the issues are the short line railroad assistance package that Congress passed and how it will positively affect the agriculture industry, the livestock reinvestment program that will allow ranchers who have been hit hard by drought conditions to rebuild their herds by deferring capital gains taxes, and how I was able to work with Congressional leadership to pass much-needed disaster assistance for farmers and ranchers who have suffered multiple years of drought.

I also spoke to the Farm Bureau members about the need to preserve our rural and agricultural way of life. The family farm provides a unique opportunity for grandparents, parents and grandchildren to work together. In the process, knowledge, values and a work ethic is passed from one generation to the next. This experience is unique and is worth fighting to protect.

Hays

On Tuesday, I attended my local Lions Club meeting at the Hays Country Kitchen and visited with club members. The group gave me my marching orders for my return to Congress later this month and for the 109th Session of Congress, which begins in January. I look forward to representing them and the rest of the First District upon my return.

Speaking to the Kansas Bankers Association

On Wednesday, I joined the Kansas Bankers Association (KBA) in Topeka to celebrate the career of Jim Maag. Jim has been with the Bankers Association for almost 25 years, serving as the association's President. I have worked with Jim since my days in the Kansas Senate, and his presence will be missed at the KBA. I wish he and his wife Kathy, all the best in his retirement.

Very truly yours,

Jerry